

*The Nature of Truth and Falshood; with
some Motives to the Practice of Mutual
Sincerity.*

A

S E R M O N

Preached before the

QUEEN,

In St. GEORGE's Chapel at *Windſor*;

On the 10th Day of *Auguſt* 1712,

Being the Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

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to HER MAJESTY, and Vicar of *St. Mary's*
in *Reading*.

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EPHES. IV. 25.

*Wherefore putting away Lying,
 speak every Man Truth with
 his Neighbour; for we are
 Members one of another.*



THAT Man was made for Society, the Faculty of Speaking is a Proof sufficient: And it is as certain, that *Death and Life*, all the Good and Evil of Society, are in the Power of the Tongue. God therefore hath so bridled it in our Constitution, that a tender Sinner cannot lye, without doing Violence not only to his Conscience, but to his very Complexion too; and where the Notion of a Deity is rooted up, even there we may observe some wild Remains of Honour for Truth.

And as we are thus formed by Nature; and led on by Reason to a social Life, the Gospel hath superadded the most

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perfect Rules of Love, and the strongest Motives to incorporate and build us up into the most lasting and beautiful Union. For we are, (says St. Paul) *fitly joined together* by the Blood of one Redeemer, by one Baptism, by one Rule of Faith, and are all one Mystical Body animated by one and the same Spirit. From which manifold Tye of Relation and Endearment, the Apostle draws this Conclusion, *Wherefore putting away Lying, &c.*

It will be necessary from these Words briefly to enquire First, *Into the Nature of Truth and Falshood, and to shew wherein they both consist.*

Secondly, *To consider the several Kinds of Falshood, and whether a Lye of any Kind, or in any Case, be allowable.*

And then in the Last Place, I shall lay before you some Motives to the Practice of mutual Sincerity, with a more especial Regard to the Apostle's Argument, For we are Members one of another.

In Compliance with the Order of the Text, and because the first Step to Virtue is to depart from Vice, I begin with the Nature of Falshood, *Wherefore putting away Lying.*

Truth and Falshood.

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The *Falshood*, which is the Subject of our present Inquiry, and commonly goes by the Name of a *Lye*, is not a *mistaken Notion*, or an Error in the Understanding: For such Spots there will be in the clearest Head. Nor is it a *Logical Untruth*, when our words agree not with the Nature of things. A *Logical Truth* may be a *Moral Lye*: For we speak not *truly* in a *Moral Sense*, because the thing is *true*, but because we conclude it so to be. The *Falshood* here is of the wilful Kind, when a Man speaks otherwise than he thinks in his Heart, tho' the thing spoken should be true. We have *Casuists*, I know, of great Authority, who make an *evil Intention* an essential Ingredient in the Constitution of a *Lye*; but this I believe, will appear by the following Discourse to be rather an Aggravation of the Sin, than a Part of its Essence.

From this Definition of a *Lye*, we may easily collect the Nature of that *Truth* opposed to it in the Text. For the Apostle in this Place considers Man as a Creature framed for Society, and prescribeth the Rule he is to act by as such: And consequently the *Truth* here prescribed cannot be a *right Notion of things* residing

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siding only in the Mind: Nor barely, the Truth of a Proposition, or the Agreement of our Speech with the Subject it is applyed to; but must jointly consist in the Conformity of the Tongue with the Sentiments of the Heart, for upon this all the Good of Society depends. The Nature of Truth and Falshood being thus explained and stated, I proceed,

Secondly, To consider the several Kinds of Falshood, and whether a Lye of any Kind, or in any Case be allowable.

Of all the Sorts of Falshood, the most criminal is that of the *Pernicious Kind*; and the most destructive of this Kind, is the *Speaking Evil of Dignities*; either by loading them with Vices they know not, which is *Slander*: Or by clipping those Virtues they shine with, which is *Detraction*. And it is equally fatal in the Effect, whether the *Arrow flyeth by Night, or killeth at Noon-day*; whether a good Name be battered down by open Calumny, or blown up by Whisper.

Reputation gives the Life and Lustre to a Magistrate, and turns every thing he toucheth into Gold: It is *better than precious Ointment*: For it not only maketh the

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Bones fat, and refresheth the Ruler upon every Reflection, but the Virtue of it will raise the Dead, and work Wonders on his People; whereas Detraction and Slander, by a strange Magick will take off the Wheels of his Chariot, the Edge of his Sword, and the Vigour of his Thought, and render the best Man useless to the Publick. Mark 6. 5 This made Christ himself that *he could do no mighty Work* in his own Countrey. And a Prince (not to be forgotten by any Heart that is *truly English*) when once blackened by Calumny, found the *Lying Spirit* too strong for all his Charms; not the *Grace of his Lips*, the most wise and tender Applications, could persuade his *Possessed* Subjects to hear of being healed by that Royal Hand, which might have cured any *Evil* but *That of the Tongue*.

To defame therefore *Those in Authority*, is to blast the *Tree of Life*, and all the Influences of Sovereign Virtue: 'Tis to poison the *Breath of our Nostrils*, and at the same time to disable the Physician from doing Good on the Patient. And since the common Dealers in publick Scandal are not admitted to the first Springs of Government, but see thro' a
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Glass darkly, and too often discoloured by Passion and Prejudice, therefore when they shoot out their Arrows, even bitter words, and hit the Truth, it is by Chance only and Conjecture; and consequently they will be found Liars before God, and of the most pernicious Kind. I have staid the longer upon this Particular, because *State Slander* is a growing Evil, and almost too big for Correction; and because it is the least repented of, tho' the most irreparable of any. As to all other pernicious Lies of an inferior Nature, I need say no more, but that in every mischievous Lye there is a twofold Iniquity, Falshood and Injury; a Sin against the God of Truth, and against the Right of our Neighbour, and therefore unquestionably evil.

Another Species of Falshood is the *Festive Lye*: When we speak falsely, not with an Intention to hurt, but to delight only. And considering how much Truth is sacrificed to this Idol, both in Conversation and Writing, one would be apt to think it a Social Virtue to make merry at the Expence of Truth. But I take this to be unlawful, and for these Reasons

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sons. First, Because the Formality of a Lye consists in the Intention to speak a Falshood, and therefore no End can justify an Intention evil in it self; The *Jesting* Lyar sins less than the *Pernicious* one, but still he sins, not by intending to please, but by intending to do it by a Lye. Secondly, Truth is a Pearl of infinite Value, not to be sold to save my own Life, much less to feed another's Vanity: and one might as well ask me to steal for his Support, as to lye for his Diversion. I shall only add, that the stated Rule of Christian Conversation is *Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.* And if we believe that our Judge will call us to an Account at the last Day for *every idle Word*, we can hardly think it adviseable to venture so near Damnation for a Jest.

As to Parables and other Fictions of the facetious Kind, if they are not represented as Truths, nor fairly to be taken as such, according to the common Modes of Speech, then are they warranted from Scripture and Reason; because, when justly applyed, they do insinuate some unwelcome Truths with a better Grace,
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and drive the Wedge with a more agreeable Force than downright Arguments can do.

The only Point then that will admit of a Dispute, is the *Officious* or Charitable Lye: To rescue suffering Innocence by the Help of a Lye, seems so beautiful an Error, (if it be one) that a good Man can hardly forbear espousing the Charity with this Imperfection about it. The Blessing likewise upon the *Egyptian Midwives* seemeth to authorize a *Pious Fraud*; and it is the Judgment of considerable Casuists, that it is no Sin to deceive him by a Lye, who has no Right to Truth.

Now in Matters of Morality the Rule is perpetual, and without Exception. *We must not do Evil that Good may come*; and therefore if a Lye be a moral Evil, no Circumstances can make it good. In every Lye there is an Intention to deceive, and this very Intention, I say, is in it self evil; for it is a voluntary Deviation from the Will of God, whose moral Perfection is never to intend or will a Falshood; but always to love the Truth; and therefore as necessarily as God loves himself, so neces-

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necessarily must he hate that which is repugnant to his own Veracity. Our God is by Nature a *God of Truth*, and hath made us after his own Image, and commanded us to be Perfect as he is Perfect: and therefore we are indispensably obliged to conform to the Divine Will; to do, as we imagine *the God of Truth* would do in our Place, and as the Son of God did do in our Nature. So that to ask, Whether an Officious Lye is not lawful, is in Effect to ask, Whether it is not lawful to do like *the Father of Lyes*, that Good may come? Whether it is not lawful to love my Neighbour better than my God, who is *Truth itself*; or whether I may not please my Maker by acting in opposition to his essential Holiness? The Passions in themselves are neither Good nor Evil, and therefore God has set them their Bounds which they shall not pass; *We may be Angry, and Sin not*, and consequently, Anger in its own Nature cannot be sinful; but it is no where said, *Hitherto shalt thou Lye, and no further*. The Art of Lying by Rule and Measure, with Views and Reserves, cannot be from above; for the Wisdom from thence

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hath frequently and universally declared, *Lying Lips to be an Abomination to the Lord, and that no Lye is of the Truth,*

But if a Lye may be more or less sinful in proportion to the Good of the End ; it may seem to be little or no Sin at all when the Good doth more than balance the Evil of the Lye. *For if the Truth of God hath more abounded through my Lye, why yet am I judged as a Sinner ?* To Steal for the Poor is indeed less sinful than to Steal for my Lusts ; because it argues less Pravity in the Will ; but the Charity intended will not take out the Stain, and make it Just to Steal. The Blood of Christ will compensate for Sins Committed, but even that most precious Blood cannot make it lawful to commit Sin ; because it cannot alter the eternal Reasons of Good and Evil ; and therefore if it be impossible in Nature for God himself to Lye, it seems equally impossible for him to make it allowable in Man.

As to the *Egyptian Midwives*, I know it is generally concluded they told an Untruth ; but I see no certain Ground for the Conclusion. For if, the more the *Israelites* were afflicted, the more they

they multiplied ; why might not the Hebrew Women by the same Distinguishing Providence be delivered e'er the Midwives came in unto them : Tho' when they came, they saved the Men-Children alive in awful Regard to the God of Israel ? But supposing they did Lye ; 'tis certain they were not Rewarded for so doing ; for it is said, *because the Mid-* Exod. i. 21. *wives feared God, that he made them Houses.* The thing Rewarded was the godly Fear, and not the Falshood. This in Mercy he passed over, and did them Good for doing Good to his People. After all, no Precedents of Old are perfect enough for our Imitation ; for we are to live by Rule, and not by Example. It is not what *One of Egypt*, &c. might do ; but whether *One of the heavenly Jerusalem* may lye upon any Consideration ? And then we answer with || *St. Austin*, that † *no Lye is of the Truth* : || Lib. contra Mend. cap. 5. And of the Citizens of this City it is written, * *In their Mouth was found no* † Joh. 2. 2 * Revel. 14. 5. *Guile.* They of Old did not do well in Lying, and if we imitate them, we do worse.

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And now if the greatest Good upon Earth ought not to be compassed by the Means of a Lye; what a melancholy Reflection is it, to consider how much Truth falls day by day a Victim to Pride, Revenge, Ambition and Interest, and even to the Modes and Fashions of the World that are altogether lighter than Vanity itself; to see nothing but the Ghost of Integrity walk about in the Form of sound Words and good Looks, and occasionally Kneeling down even at the Horns of the Altar! Truth is a Virtue divinely fair, and venerable in any Dress; she looks well, and commands a secret Reverence from Herod himself when she is cloathed only like her Preacher the Baptist, with Camels Hair, and a Leathern Girdle about her Loins; but when she is in her soft Cloathing, made for Kings Houses; when she is arrayed in all the Graces of Education and Politeness, then she shines in Perfection and Beauty irresistible.

And therefore I proceed in the next and last Place, To lay before you some Motives to the Practice of mutual Sincerity with a more especial Regard to the Apostle's

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Argument — For we are Members one of
the other.

And here I shall consider Man, first,
in his natural State, or meerly as a social
creature.

It is not good that Man should be alone :
that he cannot enter into Society, nor be
happy in it, without fixing the significa-
tion of Words, and keeping to that cur-
rent Meaning which Custom hath stamped
upon them ; and therefore to speak one
thing, and mean another, to Bless with
the Mouth, and Curse inwardly, is High-
treason against the Fundamental Law of
Society. The Tongue was given by God
to express the Sentiments of the Heart,
and when it deviates from this, it goes
counter to the Will and Design of its Ma-
ster. Thus again, to gild over Malice with a
smile, to betray with a Kiss, or stab in
an Embrace, are Circumstances that add
horror almost equal to the Crimes ; and
why ? Because these are the external
marks, the natural Image and Super-
scription of Kindness in the inward Parts ;
and by walking in this vain Shew of
truth, we look a Lye, as well as speak
one ; and therefore to counterfeit the
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Hand-writing of Nature, to borrow the Face of Innocence the better to do Mischief, is doubly unnatural.

Was the State of Nature indeed a State of War, then it would be equally indifferent which way we carried it on, whether by *Words softer than Oyl*, and by cutting Throats with a Feather, or by Swords, and open Violence. But now if we are born for Society, for the Help and Comfort of one another, if our natural Aversions to Solitude, and our mutual Dependencies prompt us to mutual Benevolence, if the Culture of Arts and Sciences, of Trade and Commerce, if the Delights of Friendship, the Beauty and Strength of Government, with all that is worth living for, if all these turn upon the Fidelity of the Tongue, surely then we are obliged to Sincerity, as united by one common Nature, and by all the Ties and Motives to Happiness in this World.

Let us now look upon our selves in a nobler View, not only *as Men*, but *as Christians*.

The *Priscillianists* upon this very Account, and from this very Text (for what Text is plain enough for some Men?)

Aug. lib.

contra.

Mend. cap. 2.

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extracted a *Salvo* for Lying to *Infidels*; because they and Christians were not *Members one of another*. And what these *Hereticks* built up, *lo others have daubed with untempered Morter*! For have not *Christians* distinguished *Christians* out of their Lives, even against the publick Faith, and by Equivocation and mental Reservation spun out the *Art of Leasing* to such extreme Finess and Subtlety, that by the Sleight of these *inward Supplies* the Devil himself need never tell a Lye to serve his Ends? But this, in the phrase of the Prophet, is to *Sin as it were with a Cart-rope*: It is to draw Men to lye upon Principle, and to be ten times worse by Religion than they are by Nature; for if the *Light that is in them be Darknes*, how great is that *Darknes*! But we, I hope, have not so learned Christ; and yet, methinks, there is a Spice of this *Popish* Sincerity in the Practice of some *Protestants*; there seems to be more of the *Serpent* than the *Dove*, in subscribing Doctrines with one Hand, and writing directly against them with the other.

We are all Purchased with the same Blood, and Nourished by the same Spirit,

we have renounced the *Father of Lyes* at our Baptism, and often eat of the *Bread of Sincerity and Truth* at our Master's Table; and Love, unfeigned universal Love, is the Badge our Lord will have his Disciples known by; and therefore Insincerity is such a Solecism in a *Christian*, as Iniquity is in a *Judge*, or ill Breeding in a *Courtier*: It is a Sin against our Profession, and in that very Thing, which is the principal Part and Beauty of our Calling. Let us therefore examine our Ways, and see whether we *walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith we are called*? How did the Primitive Saints bless their Persecutors, and how do we revile our Benefactors? Can we be Members of Christ, and Citizens of Heaven, while we deal so much in Craft and Dissimulation upon Earth, while our *Lips drop as an Honey-comb*, and spread the finest Flowers of the Tongue upon the falsest Heart? What is Conversation now a-days but a Match at Fencing, where we falsifie a Blow to make that Part unguarded, which we design to strike? What is Friendship but the Skin of Sincerity stuffed out with Wind and Compliment,

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ment, with Professions of infinite Respect and Kindness, when the Heart intends nothing thereby, or something worse than nothing? Give me leave to say with St. James, *My Brethren, These things ought not so to be.* They are the foulest Blot upon our most holy Profession, and would introduce a greater Curse than that of *Babel*, were not good Words by long Abuse grown to be but words of Course, and well known to signify nothing. And after all, Sincerity is the most easie, pleasant, and surest Way to make our Fortunes in this World, as well as in that to come.

For it is much *easier* to be honest in Truth, than in Appearance only; because Honesty hath not far to go, and the Way is plain before her, she hath not many Words to make, but is believed and trusted without more a-doe; she is conscious of no Evil, and therefore stands in no need of Art and Colouring, but loves the Light, and is always ready to come forth in her native Simplicity, and to appear as she is; whereas Hypocrisy has a longer Journey and a worse road to travel, she dares not stir abroad

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without her Varnish, and is extremely hard put to it to play the Part of Nature to the Life, and to make Picture pass for Reality. The *Double-minded Man* is at Variance with himself, and *unstable in all his Ways*; he is often bewildered, and at a loss which way to turn; his Head is perplexed to cover the Iniquity of his Heart, and perpetually at the Anvil to forge one Plot for the Support of another; But the *Integrity of the Upright shall guide them*, not only by a more direct and easy Passage, but by a more *delightful* one also.

When a Man's Ways please the Lord, they always please himself, and at the long run his Enemies too. While he proposes a good End, and pursues it by fair Means, all goes well within: He has good Reason to hope, and none to fear, and therefore if he meets with Rubs and Disappointments from without, he is *satisfied from himself*. He has two faithful Friends, God and his Conscience, and they will stand by him in the Day of Trouble, and conduct and comfort him in all his Goings. But Dissimulation and Falshood lay waste the inward Satisfaction of the Soul, and wound that Spirit

which

which alone *would bear our Infirmities* : They put the Dissembler upon the Rack, and force him to look well in the Face, when he is sick at Heart, and to be constantly inconsistent with himself. He cannot sincerely enjoy the present Success of his Devices, for fear of future Discovery : For when ever the Mask drops off (and it is next to impossible to keep it always on) then all the fine Schemes perish ; then the Crafts-men and their Craft, the Spider and the Spider's Web come down even to the Ground. And when a Man hath once made Shipwreck of his Honesty by his Cunning, who will believe him when he speaks true, or trust him when he intends honestly ? So that Wisdom and Innocence are the only things that will carry us thro' every Stage with Pleasure, and *hold out to the End* ; which is the last Motive to Sincerity I shall mention.

The Lip of Truth shall be established for ever, but a lying Tongue is but for a Moment, was Solomon's Maxim, and hath been verified in all Ages. A Lye is a sickly Thing, and *hath but a short time to live* : It cometh up, and is cut down like a Flower :

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er: It fleeth as, it is indeed, a Shadow, and never continueth in one Stay. It is like a Default in Nature or a Male-formation of Parts, which gives constant Pain, and requires perpetual Patching, and which no Skill can ever rectify; whereas Honesty, like a just and vigorous Constitution, wants not the Help of Physicians, and without any Trouble wears well to the last. Truth is a Rock that will stand the Test of Time and Malice: But when we build upon Falshood and Artifice, we build upon the Sand; and tho' mighty Structures have been raised upon this slippery Foundation, and made a goodly Show and glitter for a while, yet when the Winds blew and beat upon that House, it fell, and great was the Fall of it. He that would preserve the Beauty of his Character fresh and lovely to the End, must be sure to act upon steady and uniform Principles; for nothing can long support the Reputation of a great Name, but the two Pillars of Prudence and Sincerity.

Prov. 4: 18.

The Path of the Just is as the shining Light, that shineth more and more unto a perfect Day. They rise like the Sun, and rejoyce

rejoyce to run the Course of Virtue; and
 tho' Envy and Ignorance, Faction and
 Prejudice may overcast their Morning,
 yet Integrity by degrees will clear their
 Way, whereby they acquire new Strength
 in every Advance, and shine more and
 more unto a perfect Day; then we re-
 joyce in the Light, and see no more
 spots in the Sun. It was the Saying of
 the wisest Prince, that *righteous Lips are*
the Delight of Kings, and they love him Prov. 16.
that speaketh right. Flattery and Cun-^{13.}
 ning may delight and flourish for a Sea-
 son, but in our Heart we can love no-
 thing but Honesty; Insincerity is the ug-
 liest Vice in Nature, and the last thing
 we can forgive. He then that *walketh*
uprightly, walketh surely; he reflects with
 a Godlike Satisfaction upon all his Works,
 and this Reflection carries him on his Way
 with Security and Pleasure, and brings
 him Peace at the last, when he stands
 most in need of it; *the just Man walketh* Prov. 20. 7.
in his Integrity, and his Children are blessed
after-him. He leaves a good Name be-
 hind him, and the Blessing of God and
 Man upon his Childrens Children; where-
 as the Man of Falshood, Ambition and
 Ava-

Avarice, can neither look backward nor forward with any solid Comfort; he sees nothing in himself he can approve, and so goes out of the World with much greater Anxiety and Confusion than he lived in it.

Thus Honesty will be found the best Policy in every Respect: It is the most easy, pleasant and sure Way to Happiness here and hereafter; and therefore forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee, love her, and she shall keep thee; when thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitned; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble; when thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. To conclude therefore, he that would see good Days both now and ever, let him refrain his Tongue from Evil, and his Lips that they speak no Guile; for Sincerity is the Virtue that must crown us in both Worlds. And so To God the Father who cannot Lye, and to God the Son, who is the express Image of his Father, and to God the Holy Ghost who was sent to lead us into all Truth be ascribed all Honour and Glory from this time forth and for evermore. Amen.



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